

Presbyterians Sharing Sunday
Worship Resource

September 26, 2010



The Presbyterian Church in Canada
www.presbyterian.ca

Call to worship

The mystery of human existence is that we belong to God and have been made in the divine image. In God we live and move and have our being. Therefore, we know ourselves only when we know God. Our lives must reflect the Creator's love and purpose for all creation. We acknowledge God as Creator and Lord.

Living Faith 2.2.1

Come, let us worship God.



Welcome

Today, our service of worship draws inspiration from the work we do together through *Presbyterians Sharing*. This is our ministry. It's one way that we join hands with Presbyterians across Canada.

Together we are proclaiming the good news of the gospel in word and deed. Together we are helping grow innovative ministries for children and youth and equipping lay leaders and ministers to do effective ministry. Together we are supporting new church developments and helping struggling congregations renew and grow their ministries. Together we are sending out mission staff to proclaim the good news. Together we are speaking out for the voiceless and supporting healing and reconciliation ministries in our communities.

This year our congregation has committed to giving \$ _____ to *Presbyterians Sharing*. Today, as we worship God, let us reflect on what we can do to be God's hands – in our community, in our country and around the world.

Prayers of Approach and Confession

Gracious and loving God, you have demonstrated your deep care for us by renewing our lives through the living Christ and the ongoing power of the Holy Spirit. We praise and adore you for hearts and lives tenderised by such goodness and love and we pray that our lives reflect your great acts of kindness towards us.

God of wisdom and power, we confess that there are times when we find it difficult to see beyond the foolishness of the cross to the sacrificial love that ended Jesus' earthly life. Help us to see Christ's preparedness to die condemned, betrayed and deserted by followers and friends, not as evidence of weakness, but as a powerful sign of his self-giving love. He endured the cross so that we would be empowered to live lives shaped by that same love. Forgive us when we follow the wisdom of the world and find self-serving love more to our liking.

Paul implores us to understand God's values as revealed in the outpoured love and life of Jesus. When we boast, we are to boast in the Lord. Forgive us when, instead, we boast about our achievements, our status, our authority, our wisdom.

Merciful God, we thank you that your wisdom and power enables us to grasp the true meaning of the cross: the great depth of your love for the world. A love made flesh in Jesus Christ; a love that will not let us go.

With gentle and generous hearts, we seek to be credible disciples of Jesus – proclaiming the gospel with integrity to friends and strangers alike. May we never boast about anything except the love of Jesus, which led him to the cross on our behalf. Awake in us a love like his, a love totally directed towards serving you and one another.

All this we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour.

Amen.



Scripture

2 Kings 5:1-19

1 Corinthians 1:18-29



Suggested Hymns

(All hymn numbers are from *The Book of Praise*, 1997)

- Hymn #466 *Praise the Lord with the sound of trumpet*
Hymn #560 *Put peace into each other's hands*
Hymn #762 *When the poor ones*
Hymn #763 *To show by touch and word*
Hymn: #775 *Sent forth by your blessing*
Hymn #802 *For the fruits of all creation*

Children's Story

Purpose:

To show how people working together can create something incredible.

Equipment:

- Your favourite recipe for cupcakes, muffins or cookies
- The ingredients for the above baked goods
- The finished product
- Large cloth shopping bag

Prep:

- Make the cupcakes, muffins or cookies
- Put them in a container at the bottom of the bag
- Put the raw material you would need to make the baked goods into the bag

Note: This story has been written using vanilla cupcakes. Feel free to adapt it to suit your needs. If children leave for Sunday School after the children's story take the cupcakes with you and share them there or make enough to serve at coffee hour after the service. Be aware of allergies in the group and consider preparing a gluten free option for children with wheat allergies.

Story

Every Part Matters

Anybody feel like a snack today?

Let's see what I have in this bag.

Start pulling out the ingredients

Some flour, eggs, salt, baking powder, vanilla, butter – hmmm, sugar – yep, looks good. Anybody want some? How about a spoonful of flour? A raw egg? A little bit of baking powder?

What, this doesn't look good to you? You're right – most of these ingredients on their own aren't very good to eat, except maybe the sugar and the eggs, if they were cooked. But when you mix them together you can make wonderful things...

Pull out your recipe card or book

including my favourite vanilla cupcakes.

Read the recipe out loud

Now, I wonder what would happen if I left some of it out?



Well, for sure we need the flour – that helps give the substance to the cupcake.

The sugar gives it its sweetness. The eggs and oil help hold it together.

But what about the baking powder – you don't seem to need a lot of it.

Do you think it's important?

Well, I don't know if you have ever left baking powder out of a recipe – but your cupcakes turn out pretty flat. In fact, they probably wouldn't look like cupcakes at all. The fact is, all of the ingredients are important – big or small, wet or dry – they all make the cupcake.

People are a bit like this too. We are all different. Some of us are big, some of us are small. Some can sing, some are good with numbers, some are great teachers and some are talented artists. There are some things we can do on our own, but we can do even more incredible things when you mix us together!

In our church service today we are looking at the things that can happen when people work together. One way our church works together is by giving our offerings. That's our gift to God – a way we do God's work together. Some of what we give goes to *Presbyterians Sharing*, so that we can share our gifts with people across Canada and around the world.

Churches across Canada – big and small – send in gifts to *Presbyterians Sharing*, and together we share in a lot of different ministries. We send mission staff to different parts of the world – Malawi, Kenya, Ukraine, Guatemala, Pakistan. We help start new churches and train ministers for our churches. We are doing lots of incredible things together in the name of Jesus.

So, when you are feeling like you are only a small part of this church, I need you to remember the baking soda in the cupcake and how even small ingredients can make a huge difference – just like you can!

Let us pray.

Dear God,
Thank you for designing us all with different skills and talents,
and using each of us – big and small – to do your work.
In Jesus' name, amen.

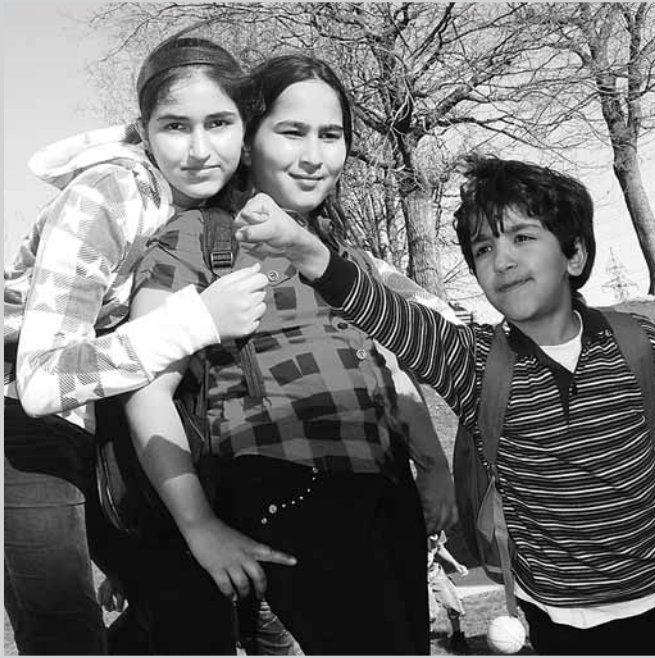
Your gifts to *Presbyterians Sharing*

- support mission in Canada through Canada Ministries
- send mission staff to different parts of the world through International Ministries
- speak out for the vulnerable through Justice Ministries
- equip our leaders through theological colleges
- support ministry candidates and new clergy through Ministry and Church Vocations
- equip churches with Christian education, worship and evangelism material through the Vine
- send out short-term volunteers to experience mission
- help congregations encourage generosity through the Planned Giving and Stewardship offices
- help regional staff equip congregations in each Synod
- allow General Assembly to make decisions and set priorities



Let the little lead

*Amazing God,
we humbly ask that
the words spoken
this morning bear
your message to
your people
gathered here.
May the Holy Spirit
fill us all
with grace,
understanding
and purpose.
Amen.*



Today is *Presbyterians Sharing Sunday*. So today we are going to listen to stories of mission; stories of people doing God's work, sharing God's story. Stories can define us and teach us; they can show us who we are and give us different ways to look at the world. We will start with a story from the Bible, and then look at stories from our Presbyterian Church in Canada mission workers – and together learn more about our role in mission.

The Transformation of Naamaan

At its heart, the passage from 2 King's chapter five is a conversion story; the story of how a powerful General from a foreign land came to believe in the power and greatness of Yahweh, the God of Israel.

The main character in this story is Naamaan, a general from the kingdom of Aram. The nation of Aram was located just to the north of Israel, where modern day Syria now is, and, at the time, was Israel's greatest enemy. According to the biblical story, none other than Israel's own Yahweh gave the Arameans victory over the Israelites through the leadership of Naaman. We learn that Naaman was a skilled, powerful general; yet, despite his greatness as a military strategist and mighty warrior, he suffered from a disease, a dreaded disease that could soon strip him of his status and power: leprosy.

The first minor character introduced in today's scripture is an Israelite slave who served the wife of Naamaan. She appears in only three verses of the story, speaks only two short sentences, and we never even learn her name, but her words set the events of our story in motion.

*'If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria!
He would cure him of his leprosy.'*

It is this young girl, captured in a battle or in one of the frequent raids that the Arameans conducted into Israel, unlikely to ever see her home or family again, who suggests how Naamaan, the man who commanded the troops that ripped her from her home, might be cured. She speaks only a few simple words, and yet it is a statement of faith, a significant statement which suggests she still believes in the ultimate power of her God, the God of Israel, despite the triumph of worldly power in her life. It is a statement which moves the mighty to act; it is the little leading the powerful.

Here we also learn of two other powerful characters who play small roles in this story: the king of Aram and the king of Israel. The king of Aram misinterprets the method of healing and sends a letter to the king of Israel demanding that he cure Naamaan of his leprosy. The king of Israel, knowing he cannot cure Naamaan, becomes upset, and probably afraid, as the king of Aram is more powerful than he is and has already defeated Israel in battle. Both kings, the very people who represent political power, do not understand the power of God. They do not understand that God's power is greater than their worldly power.

In the end it is the prophet Elisha who hears of the king of Israel's dilemma and tells the king to send Namaan to him. Elisha was the attendant and disciple of Elijah. After Elijah was taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot, Elisha was accepted as the leader of the sons of the prophets, and became noted in Israel. Like Elijah he was a powerful prophet of the Lord, renowned for his prophecies and his healing abilities. His name means "My God is salvation" and he possessed, according to his own request, "a double portion" of Elijah's spirit. For sixty years, from approximately 892-832 BCE, he held the office of the "prophet of Israel."

So Namaan goes to Elisha, and Elisha sends a messenger to tell him, "Wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean." Namaan is insulted and angry, both that Elisha didn't come out to meet him personally and that the cure is so simple. You can almost see him storming through his caravan knocking things over and shouting,

I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy! Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?

Again it is a group of nameless servants, speaking only two short sentences, whose words change the course of this story. It would be far easier and far safer for them to keep silent, but instead of cowering in fear, the servants take a stand and encourage their master to listen to the prophet:

'Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, "Wash, and be clean"?'

Words of wisdom coming from the least expected: again the little leading the mighty.

And so, in this story of mission – the story of the transformation of the General Namaan – it is through the words and actions of the powerful and the mighty, together with the words and actions of the weak and the small, that Namaan came to know the God of Israel and proclaimed, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel."

Connecting Scripture with Our Mission Today

So what is the lesson for the church today, for those of us who want to follow Jesus? For those of us who want to heed God's call in our lives and carry out God's mission on this earth? We need to ask who we take for granted. Who do we look past without even seeing?

Our churches are filled with people on the margins, people who are not in the spotlight, people whose faith is strong but who quietly work in the background. These are people who God is working through, yet we fail to notice, much less listen to them. We need to remember to listen to those around us who are considered little or insignificant in the eyes of the world, but who are, in the eyes of God, significant indeed. What role can they play in God's mission?

Learning from Prisoners in Malawi

Last year, The Reverend Ed Hoekstra, shared his experience of ministering to prisoners in Malawi. Ed goes every Tuesday to lead a Bible study at the Chichiri Prison – one of the largest prisons in Malawi – with the Synod Prison Chaplain, Rev. Stanley Chimesya. The inmates love the study, and if the ministers are late, they will often begin without them.

In this dismal prison environment – too often short of the very basics of life – food, soap, toothpaste, clothing – Ed is constantly surprised by the thoughtful and insightful comments from the inmates, often learning as much from them as he shares. Ed reflects that he often forgets that "the Holy Spirit surprises us in situations we least expect."

This year, many of these prisoners were given a special opportunity to minister to the St. Columba congregation, one of the largest Presbyterian congregations in Blantyre, Malawi. Ed's wife, Jackie, shares what she learned from that experience:

The prison visit to St. Columba was an amazing success. The church body embraced the prisoners with enthusiasm. They cheered and clapped for their singing, which was indeed wonderful. Pardon the cliché, but they sang like angels.

After two services they were brought into the community hall for a mountain of food. Their plates were literally heaped a foot high and they dug in and ate all of it. I honestly don't think I've ever seen anyone eat so much food. They were young, tenderly so. They were someone's son, husband, brother or uncle. When we chatted they were polite and joked and, even though I tried hard to see the murderer or thief, all I could see was their human faces.

We escorted the bus back to the prison singing all the way back. Then we had another service inside of the prison with thanksgiving and singing and prayers. The prisoners inside the prison were excited because they had already heard the broadcast on the radio.

The meek sharing their gifts of wisdom and faith with the mighty – this is what our mission and ministry is all about.

Learning from Boarding Homes Residents in Toronto

The Reverend Rodger Hunter coordinates Boarding Homes Ministry in inner-city Toronto with the support of *Presbyterians Sharing*. The residents of these boarding homes are some of the most marginalized in their communities: many have lived too long with rejection and wait for their lives to be received and rejoiced over.

Rodger works hard to link the residents with visitors from area congregations. People gather to worship, pray, sing, rejoice and celebrate life together. Regular visits are established and friendships blossom as this new community becomes united in Jesus. Rodger speaks of the gifts that the residents share with area congregations:

Time and again our friends in the boarding homes draw us back to the core matters of Christian community. The residents of these homes are a gift. They can be witty, charming, deeply caring and will greet us with a wonderful hospitality. Residents are brave in the face of often serious illness and tragic isolation. They frequently have great insight into spiritual matters and become our teachers in life and in our understanding of God-among-us.

Learning from, listening to, sharing in ministry with the unexpected – this is the ministry we do together when we support *Presbyterians Sharing*.

Learning from children and youth

What about our children and our youth – how do we let them lead? Pastor William Khalil ministers at Almanarah Presbyterian Church, a new church development in London, Ontario supported by *Presbyterians Sharing*. He shares what happens when their youth lead:

If there is an example of pure energy, the Almanarah kids are it! From vibrant worship to moving prayers, from building fruitful relationships to leading Sunday school, the youth of Almanarah are very busy. Some participate in the church's contemporary music ministry through the youth band. Others have begun a weekly puppet ministry for the Sunday School, using professional puppets. Plays are recorded and posted on the church's website for the kids to enjoy and view any time they want!

It is exciting to see the youth work with the Sunday school, creating a Christ-like environment in which to grow; with interactive lessons, exciting games, new songs to learn, and spiritual friendships, the kids have really begun to enjoy the church.

Our youth can show us new ways of joyfully worshipping and praising God. They continually ask 'why' – why do we do things like this? Why do we worship in this way? Why do we sing in this way? They remind us to think about these things and sometimes force us to admit that the way we are doing things could be changed.



Conclusion

Today, is *Presbyterians Sharing* Sunday. The mission and ministry we do together through *Presbyterians Sharing* is about people from all walks of life discovering, uncovering, doing God's mission together – and from those words and actions, people's lives are transformed in many different ways.

The Apostle Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians tells us that the cross is foolishness, but that God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom and God's weakness is stronger than human strength. It is God himself who has chosen the foolish to shame the wise and the weak to shame the strong. It is in our nature as human beings to hold up worldly wisdom and worldly strength, yet God is calling us to something else. God is calling us to foolishness and weakness. For it is in our humility; it is in our foolishness; it is in our weakness that we will truly know God. It is when we make ourselves small, when we stand in solidarity with those whom the world considers insignificant that we bring the idea of heaven on earth a little closer to reality.

It is my prayer for you and for me and for the church universal that we can learn to let the little lead, listen to the unexpected messengers, and together, do the mission and ministry God calls us to do.

Amen.

Call to Offering

We are all God's people; created with different skills and talents, designed to be God's hands in this world. Let us join our hands to others' hands, and give our tithes and offerings to God.



Prayer of Dedication

Lord, because of your goodness, we have these gifts to share. Use them to make new life possible among us and beyond us, through Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Prayers for the People

Mighty God, we come before you in prayer as your people – people who, in the eyes of the world, are mighty or small. Regardless of how the world sees us and treats us, you, O God, know who we really are. You know us in our moments of joys and our moments of sorrows. You know us in our strength and in our weakness. You know us when we are wise and when we are foolish.

Merciful God, we bring before you now the cares and concerns of this congregation. (Insert your congregational prayers here.) We also pray for our community outside these walls and for all the people in our circles of love and caring. Compassionate God, we ask for the same mercies and healing on all those people we do not know, but who are in need of the peace of Christ, for we are all your children.

Loving and gracious God, we thank you for our church, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and for the many congregations that are a part of it. May we be true witnesses, through word and deed, to the love of God that we know in Jesus Christ.

Today we pray for the mission and ministries supported through *Presbyterians Sharing*.

For International Ministries and our international mission staff working with partners in many countries around the world.

Bless these ministries, we pray.

For Canada Ministries, as they work to build and support new congregations in Canada; support ministries in our inner-cities and rural and remote regions; and support ministries with ethnic congregations, native people, university students, refugees and others.

Bless these ministries, we pray.

For regional staff and those at church offices who provide support for congregations, presbyteries and synods in their various ministries.

Bless these ministries, we pray.

For those who participate with ecumenical agencies in matters of justice, care and compassion for our world.

Bless these ministries, we pray.

For those who provide many services at our national church office – in finance, pension and benefits, communication, technology, the mail room, the switchboard and others.

Bless these ministries, we pray.

For all students, faculty and staff at our theological colleges – Knox College in Toronto, Presbyterian College in Montreal and Vancouver School of Theology in Vancouver.

Bless these ministries, we pray.

For the General Assembly, its courts, and those who work in the General Assembly office – serving the church so that we may remain faithful and strong in our witness to Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

Bless these ministries, we pray.

O God, for the joy of participating in the reconciling and transforming work of Jesus Christ, we give you thanks. Truly it is a blessing to be a blessing to others.

We offer these prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Benediction

Go now, into a world
made foolish by Christ's
death on the cross;

Saved by the wisdom
and power of God;

And in the company of
the Holy Spirit;

This day and forevermore.



A Stewardship resource, The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

For further information call 1-800-619-7301, 416-441-1111.

Text may be downloaded from www.presbyterian.ca/resources/online/197

This worship resource was prepared by Mike Burns, Knox College student, and Karen Plater, Associate Secretary, Stewardship. The sermon is based on a sermon Mike gave in Malawi, when leading a Youth in Mission trip there. Mike also prepared the prayers and benediction.